



# The City News Express

Spring

Connecting Austell Government With Its Citizens

2014

## STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS



**Mayor Joe Jerkins**

Mayor Joe Jerkins presented the Annual State of the City report to the Austell Business Association on Tuesday, March 18th at the Threadmill Complex. In his speech, he gave an update of ongoing projects, shared some statistical data and presented plans for anticipated projects and plans to provide upgraded health services for city employees and their families.

The Mayor gave the following statistics from our Police Chief, Bob Starrett. The Police Department has 40 employees and also is in charge of 911. In 2013 the department handled 360 accidents; 10 armed robberies; 17 assaults; 709 alarms and issued 4,815 citations. Austell is ranked 37th in the 50 safest cities in Georgia with populations over 5,000.

He said the Fire Department has 20 full-time and 14 part-time employees. According to Chief Williams' report, in 2013, The Fire Department answered 1,210 emergency calls with an average response time of 4:14 minutes.

Chief Williams and the Fire Department are preparing for an inspection by the ISO (Insurance Services Organization). This is a very complicated process. We anticipate having our ISO rate lowered from 4 to 3. The ISO rating determines the amount of fire insurance premiums paid by the homeowner, and if Austell qualifies for a lower rate, it will save our citizens approximately 10% on their insurance premiums.

Among the other duties of General Administration, that Department works with the employee health insurance programs. Mayor Jerkins said that the City is concerned about the health of employees, their families and the rising costs of Health Care. In looking toward long term health issues, he said the City is building a

gym for use by employees and their families. The facility which is located in the back of the Threadmill Complex will have new workout equipment, showers and a sauna. We also have initiated a weight loss program which we believe will help the employees get fit and feel better. This healthier lifestyle will certainly impact the cost of insurance in the long term.

Also, we are offering an insurance benefit to the employees, MYidealDOCTOR telemedicine. This provides 24/7/365 access to U.S. board-certified physicians who can consult, diagnose and prescribe medications if appropriate by phone or web after reviewing medical records. This benefit is new to our employees and we believe it will save them time and money by avoiding expensive ER and urgent care visits. We are concerned about our employees' health and making wise choices to save the taxpayers money.

Parts of Austell have not recovered from the 2009 flood. Randy Bowens, Director of Public Works is involved in resolving the remaining land issues that have not been resolved since the flood. Seven hundred homes were impacted by the record level waters that year, many of which are no longer habitable. To date, the City has purchased 41 homes; 15 of these in 2013 for a total of \$2,679,187.00 from FEMA and GEMA funds and a small portion of funds from Austell. There are 17 more homes to be acquired. One of the problems we are facing is that some banks will not work with us when houses are in foreclosure. We can't proceed with demolition unless we have the bank's full cooperation, so in these cases, our hands are legally tied.

In 2013 the Parks Department opened the first nine holes of the Disc Golf Course at Frog Rock. Council has approved the additional 9 holes, so now the course is complete. This is a very popular sport and there is a lot of participation from the community. At Legion Field Park, we have built a new covered horseshoe pit and added additional playground equipment. The Mayor and Council approved building a park to honor all veterans of all wars. Jim Graham, Director of the Parks Department and his staff have been working for quite some time to complete this tribute to our Veterans. Located at 2633 Veterans Memorial Highway, the Veterans Memorial Park was dedicated on March 29th.

The Threadmill is at 95% occupancy and we have sold more building permits in the past twelve months than for the past three or four years. Residential building has increased in Austell. We have sold 38 Building Permits so far this year. Recently a developer bought all of the Stonebrook subdivision, and there are plans to build it out very quickly..

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### Council Members

Ward 1 - Kirsten Anderson  
Ward 2 - Scott Thomas

Ward 3 - Randy Green  
Ward 4 - Virginia Reagan

At Large Post 1 - Ollie Clemons  
At Large Post 2 - Suzanne Thomason

# STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

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The Cobb County Commissioners are planning to ask voters to extend the current 1% SPLOST (Special Local Option Sales Tax) in a referendum this Fall. *This tax is very important to the City of Austell.* Our portion of SPLOST is more than one million dollars each year and has enabled the City to make improvements we would not have otherwise been able to make. During the four years of the recent SPLOST, we received \$4,672,186 to benefit the City of Austell.

For instance, year before last, we purchased a new Fire Engine for approximately \$500,000. In addition, streets all over the city have been resurfaced and sidewalks added in some instances. Perkerson Mill and Old Marietta Roads have been resurfaced; Cemetery Sreet has been resurfaced and sidewalks added; Austell Powder Springs Road will be resurfaced and sidewalks added; sidewalks for John Street and Betty Street; Sweetwater Street and Mulberry Street have been resurfaced and Love Street to the Douglas county line will be done in the near future.

Regarding the city finances, Denise Soesbee is the Finance Director. We have begun working on the 2014-2015 budget. Since the flood in 2009, the City has been struggling financially. We had to spend a lot of money in matching funds to purchase flooded homes that were destroyed; a bad economy; increased health insurance premiums and warm winters which impacted our Gas System fees.

Our finances are turning around. The past two winters have been cold; we have locked in our health insurance premiums for the next year so there will not be an increase and the Threadmill is at 95% capacity. In general, Austell's finances are in good shape.

In our 2014-2015 Budget, I will propose a 5% pay increase for our employees and also recommend that the Council to lower city taxes to 3.060 mils. Since Austell residents receive approximately 3 mils credit on their County tax bill because we have our own Fire Department, the net result will be zero taxes for our citizens. Austell's future is strong.



Cobb County...Expect the Best!

## Cobb Community Transit

### CCT Flex Update

Cobb County Transit is preparing a phased implementation plan for advancing sustainable transit options that connect to employment and improve quality of life serving the southern portion of Cobb County.

### South Cobb Transit Evaluation and Implementation Plan Update

This implementation plan looks at the existing performance issues with Route 30, a new flex zone service, and a new Route 25. This effort will help to improve mobility and expand transportation choices, increase transit accessibility and connectivity and provide lost-effective transit service.

Connetics Transportation Group is consulting with Cobb County to evaluate existing transit service, provide conceptual alternatives and develop recommendations.

If you would like to learn more about this transit service that can benefit our South Cobb area, contact your District Commissioner, Lisa Cupid or visit the county's website [www.cobbcounty.org](http://www.cobbcounty.org).

## NEWS FROM THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT



### Vacant and Foreclosure Property Registry Information

Austell City Council adopted a Vacant and Foreclosed Property Registry Ordinance on February 3, 2014, effective immediately. The Ordinance makes owners and mortgagees of vacant or foreclosed properties responsible for maintenance and upkeep on the property.

The Public Works Department has identified vacant or foreclosed properties throughout the city, and the required registry allows the City to maintain current information regarding the property and its owner(s).

Any owner or agent of foreclosed real property or vacant real property, including foreclosed real property and vacant real property which is also residential rental property, is required to register such property with the Austell Public Works Department within 30 days of such property becoming foreclosed or vacant real property by following the provisions of this Ordinance unless otherwise exempted by this Ordinance or State Law. this Ordinance applies to all properties within the city limits of Austell.

Any owner or agent required to register any vacant or foreclosed real property pursuant to this Ordinance or Georgia Law shall also be required to update the information within 30 days after any change in such required information regardless of whether the information provided on the Registry was in the deed under power of sale or deed in lieu of foreclosure.

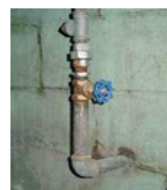
The registration fee is \$100 per registration and is non-refundable. Failure to register foreclosed real property and vacant real property could result in a fine up to \$1,000 per occurrence.

For further information regarding the registration process, please visit our website at [www.austellga.gov/registry](http://www.austellga.gov/registry) or contact Austell Public Works at 770-944+4325

## IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY



Water Meter Valve



Indoor Water Valve

Did you know that if you have a leaking waterline inside your home or business, we allow you to cut off the main water supply at the cutoff valve. However, please note that turning off your own water is for emergencies ONLY! In newer homes, a main cutoff valve is generally just after the water line enters the home.

Should you need help in locating your cutoff valve, please contact Public Works at 770-944-4325 to schedule an appointment.